

PARKVIEW AREAWIDE SENIORS, INC.

October 14, 1998

Mailing Address:
P. O. Box 14604, Cleveland, OH 44114

Doran McKeever, President
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Corrected COPY

Magalie Roman Salas,
Commission Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W., Room 222
Washington, D.C. 20554

In re: CC Docket No. 98-141
Application for Consent to the Transfer of
Licenses, etc. from Ameritech Corporation
to SBC Communications, Inc.

Re: Complaints of Parkview Areawide Seniors, Inc. USA PROGRAM as it pertains to senior citizens.

Dear Commisisoner Secretary:

Seniors are being treated as second-class citizens when it comes to the USA PROGRAM.

1. Since 1994, Ameritech has published the wrong number to apply for its USA assistance program on page 2 of their telephone book. In July 1998 after receiving many calls from seniors about the problem, we called six different operators who kept transferring us to other reps to file our complaint that the number listed was wrong and seniors were confused as to where and how to get information about applying for the USA program. We were assured by Cleveland's Ameritech's President, Jackie Wood's, administrative assistant on July 20, 1998, that he would take care of the matter. On September 3, 1998, the number still had not been changed. Hundreds of seniors have suffered pecuniary losses since 1994 from Ameritech's negligence in not putting into place the right phone number and well-trained reps to help seniors.

2. Seniors in assisted living homes or nursing homes were being denied USA because of various reasons:

(a) One senior reported the rep told her, "You're not paying enough on your limited call rate to get USA service." She was told she would be charged \$2.99 per month in case the inside wiring needed repaired since she was in an assisted nursing home. When she added this charge, she was told she then eligible for the USA discount. Seniors are complaining that their minute/limited calls were being used up by nursing home personnel or aides making calls on their phone and they were afraid to speak up. Having no way to check these calls, seniors phone bills become excessive.

(b) Seniors in nursing homes or assisted living dwellings should be permitted to have private telephone phone service without having to go to a pay phone where there is no privacy whatsoever in the event the senior would like to confide in their family if there is a problem there. The home then becomes an institution and the seniors suffer emotionally, psychologically, physically and socially withdrawing from reality into a confused and uncaring environment. Schools and libraries are covered for USA discounts but those patrons are young and have earning potential. Seniors in custodial care should be given the privilege of their own phone with a discount.

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List A B C D E

2. Ameritech will not permit seniors who have Caller ID or Call Waiting to have USA. We know of seniors who are on oxygen and have other necessary medical necessities which necessitate their having. Caller ID while on an oxygen machine, etc. Seniors are deluged with undesirable or harassing calls and need to know who is calling to prevent them from having to turn off a machine to answer the phone to see who it is. A Caller ID is important for them. Ameritech's reps are misinforming these seniors when they call and are turned down and never told that their physician could write to Ameritech and state it is a medical necessity to have such equipment to be eligible for a waiver. They, too, have lost money and worry about society's indifference towards them.

3. AT&T has the audacity to charge \$1.78+tax (or \$1.99) to their patrons each month which amount to \$21.36 per year to pay for the program and seniors who are on USA and receive \$10.20 discount per month now only get a \$8.20 discount because of AT&T's greediness. This is wrong. Even seniors who have been refused USA service are being charged this \$1.99 monthly fee. I have known seniors who have no food at the end of the month and only about \$2.00 left in their coin purses to last until the end of the month. We have had to distribute donated frozen food dinners to these needy seniors throughout the winter months because of the high costs of having a telephone. It is NOT A LUXURY. IT IS A NECESSITY.

4. Seniors who do not have a telephone are without one for many reasons, the most important of these being affordability. Many a senior who had no phone because their expenses for food, lodging, medication, clothing, etc. left not much to pay for a telephone even at the lowest cost offered by Ameritech or AT&T's long distance services to them. On several occasions, not hearing from them, they would be found dead on the floor or in bed when an investigation as to their whereabouts were made.

5. Seniors who owe a large bill because of receiving their children's collect long distance calls, and paying their current service, were told they had to pay almost 80% of the arrearages before being eligible for the USA program. A more reasonable payment schedule should be made to help the senior over this hurdle, as their income is fixed and they cannot pay more for arrearages than a minimal amount to bring it down. They continue to suffer economically .

6. Ameritech has refused to market the USA Program. Our organization is a small one and my work is on a volunteer basis. I am 75 1/2, attend law school under the Project 60 program, edit a senior paper apprising seniors of current legislation and assistance programs, and this leaves me with little time and money to help market the USA program to hundreds of seniors waiting for me to help them. On September 3, 1998, I suggested to Ameritech that they come to senior high rises and explain their program, but NO RESPONSE. This cruelty is tantamount to passing out suicide pills to seniors as the depression and sadness among many who are alone and without family or friends is rampant. These big giants, Ameritech and AT&T, have big swords.

7. Seniors are worried that in the year 2000, the assistance program will no longer be in effect. What will happen is that seniors will drop having telephones by the hundreds without this help. \$10.20 a month buys a week's groceries for them. I know. I take them shopping sometimes. But, it will be a draw between a phone that will become a luxury without the USA discount or starving or not getting proper nutrition which is needed to fortify their weakened immune systems. Please do not discontinue the USA program by the year 2000, nor permit Ameritech to merge without protecting the rights of senior citizens who are first class citizens, not second-class citizens.

8. The charges for both local and long distance services are high for seniors. Every senior should be entitled to have a telephone because they are elderly mostly living alone and without access to help.

9. Ameritech added Section 8 Federal Housing and food stamps recipients on the list to qualify for USA program which we thanked them for and which allowed those eligible seniors to apply for USA and they are truly grateful to Ameritech for this. However, we fault Ameritech for not marketing the program correctly and ignoring my personal request to help them market the program. Ameritech's executive offices should not permit their Public Relations Department to handle the USA program. It is not a public relations job. It the executive branch of the company's responsibility to appoint a person in charge of the program to coordinate and make the program accessible for seniors and in a way they can understand it. Most of their current reps are either untrained, uncaring, giving out false information and data, and are sarcastic or arrogant and lack patience with seniors who need that "extra touch", Ameritech keeps talking about that they have.

In summary, seniors need a lower rate for unlimited phone call rates. Ameritech should allow seniors to have Caller I.D's and Call Waiting features, and lower the rates for these services, in order to be eligible for USA programs. Many seniors who need them are not told of the waiver clause and are without a monthly discount. AT&T should stop charging seniors the \$1.78 (\$1.99 with taxes) the monthly costs as it takes away from their discount. Nursing home and assistant living seniors should be permitted a private phone even though they have limited call services in order to keep in touch with their families. Ameritech should change their policy on this aspect also. Ameritech should take the USA program out of the reach of their incompetent community relations personnel who do not care enough about seniors to advance the program for them. The FCC should permit the USA program to continue beyond the year 2000 and in the event of a merger, Ameritech and SBA should agree beforehand to continue this USA assistance program and lower its rates to them.

Respectfully submitted,
PARKVIEW AREAWIDE SENIORS, INC.



(Ms.) Doran T. McKeever, President

cc: Board



PHAEDRA SINGELIS / PLAIN DEALER PHOTOGRAPHER

Doran McKeever, president of Areawide Seniors Inc., points to an incorrect telephone number given by Ameritech for its discount program for the needy.

Ameritech told to spread word on programs for the needy

By **MARCUS GLEISSER**
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Speakers at a Public Utilities Commission of Ohio hearing on Ameritech Corp.'s discount telephone program for the needy yesterday called for greater efforts by the telephone company to spread its message and enroll more low-income customers.

While they praised the program that gives a \$10.20-a-month discount, several speakers told the meeting in the Lausche Ohio State Office Building in Cleveland that it should be expanded to include Caller ID and Call Waiting services.

An evidentiary hearing on the complaints is scheduled for 10 a.m. Sept. 11 at the PUCO offices in Columbus.

Ameritech has not kept its pledge to create an effective program for the poor when only 50,000 Ohioans have signed up since the plan was set up in 1994, charged Joseph P. Meissner, attorney for the Legal Aid Society.

SEE AMERITECH/2-C



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Joseph P. Meissner, Cleveland Legal Aid Society lawyer who represents the Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland Inc., told the Public Utility Commission of Ohio that Ameritech has not kept its pledge to push telephone discounts for the poor. He is flanked by Michael Mulcahy, left, Ohio Ameritech lawyer and Craig Glazer, PUCO chairman.

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AMERITECH FROM 1-C

He is on the committee set up to advise Ameritech. He represented the Empowerment Center of Greater Cleveland.

"We believe Ameritech should be made to implement the program more actively," he said. "We are concerned that so few customers enrolled and so many terminated the service."

In response, Michael Mulcahy, attorney for Ameritech in Ohio, said efforts to reach eligible participants had widened and that at the beginning of this year the discount had been increased from the previous \$8 to \$10.20 and that eligibility had been broadened to include those who receive food stamps, Medicaid, home energy assistance, Ohio Works First and federal housing assistance as well as those on welfare.

"We are trying to get the word out," he said. "We mailed more than a million pieces of mail to welfare recipients, have run ads and set up outreach groups to reach as many as possible."

He said the subsidized Universal Service Assistance program did not include Call Waiting or Caller ID and that those who insisted on having it were not eligible for the program except where medical or emergency situations may apply.

For the monthly \$10.20 discount, the program allows no security deposit, free installation, free touch-tone, free call-blocking for 900 and 976 numbers, free blocking of long distance service, and payment ar-

rangement on outstanding bills.

Doran McKeever, president of Areawide Seniors Inc., thanked Ameritech for adding Section 8 housing and food stamp recipients, but criticized an erroneous telephone number for the service in the telephone book that confused the elderly who did not know whom to call to join the program.

"I would like to see Ameritech put a clear announcement about the program for seniors and the low income with each bill they send out," McKeever said. "And we need speakers to come to the senior citizen buildings and explain the program because there are many who do not understand it."

"In our opinion this is a viable and worthwhile program for low-income participants," said Ruby Terry, executive director of the United Black Fund of Greater Cleveland, which represents 32 agencies. "All the information we got from Ameritech was very clear and in a form that could be reproduced and distributed ever more widely."

The Rev. Mylion Waite said the program was good and has the potential to help many, but that the challenge is for Ameritech to reach more people.

"More outreach is necessary and more innovative ways are needed to reach the many people out there who don't fully understand how this program works," she said. "I recommend a more intensive outreach program be initiated with the help of community organizations."

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